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ABSTRACT

This paper examines concepts of educational quality in various societies at different times throughout history. It also identifies major opposing themes which influence educational objectives, including eloquence versus efficiency, prejudice and discrimination versus social equality and educational opportunity, and conflict versus consensus. The purpose of the paper is to call attention to the philosophical notion of educational excellence at a time when this concept is either under attack or ignored in favor of the numerous mandates for mediocrity so often used to justify social inequities. The hypothesis is that our educational system encourages students to be less creative and scholarly than they might be because educators are influenced by the current social thinking that rewards efficiency and disdains eloquence. Earlier societies were influenced by very different philosophies and, as a consequence, aimed at very different educational objectives. For example, the first century orator Quintillian provided a base upon which scholars could build an order of reasonableness and academic criticism. Johan Amos Comenius, a 17th century educational reformer in Czechoslovakia, called for imparting knowledge which would begin with the senses, pass into memory through individual imagination and find expression in creativity. (John Dewey contributed the concept of experiential learning.) More recent educators and educational philosophers who have spoken in favor of academic excellence have been hampered by allegations of discrimination, prejudice, elitism, and contributing to social conflict. The conclusions are that the relationship between education and social goals is more complex than is generally realized and that educators will be doing the greatest service to diverse contemporary society if they move beyond the basics to goals that maximize individual quality. (DB)

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BEYOND THE BASICS: A CULTURALOGICAL CONCERN.

by

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Paper presented at Annual Meeting of the American Association of College of Teachers of Education (Detroit, MI, February 18, 1981).

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Assembly: "The quest for quality in utilizing knowledge from philosophical, social, and psychological foundations and other disciplines in determining educational knowledge".

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Paper Topic: "Beyond the Basics: a Culturalogical concern"

The purpose of this paper is to call attention to several themes vital to a philosophical and cultural notion of educational excellence at a time when these concepts are under attack. Educators need to move beyond the mandates for mediocrity, so often used to justify social inequities, while bearing no relationship to educational excellence in the classic sense of Quintilian, Comenius and Dewey.

Three sets of conflicting conceptual frameworks will be discussed in this paper and their subsequent relationship to the utilization of knowledge for excellence in education: wholeness/efficiency, prejudice/discrimination, and conflict/consensus.

It appears we live in a time that rewards efficiency and disdains eloquence. Granted, the notion of the "whole person" as an academic model is appreciated and even given an idiosyncratic stature in institutions of learning; however, the plaudits are reserved for the applied. The functional, the profitable, and the marketable are seen by many, to be the measure of academic success. The creative, the whimsical, and the poetic are seen as tolerable aversions not serious or substantive; therefore, far beyond the basics. To be efficient is to be predictable, unchanging, exact and always the same: a tragic yet measurable element in educational basics along.

The first century philosophical orator Quintilian provides a base upon which persons of literary and scholarly concern build

an order of reasonableness and academic criticism. Several definitions constitute the identification of a good or whole man for Quintilian. The notion of moral character is exhibited through the highest integrity of an individual. The mastery of the broad liberal arts and sciences is seen to give a firm grasp of utilitarian learning for a person's well being as opposed to the particularistic training which necessitates mere appropriate responsiveness.[1] Children have a natural capacity to grow and develop as whole people not constrained by efficient compulsions which foster only controlled emulations and guarded competition.[2] Quintilian's great faith in the young orator is best illustrated in moral virtue of the whole person, not brilliance of intellect. The persistent practicality of good schooling necessitates a noble example, a constant eloquence, and focus on refined gestures.[3]

John Amos Comenius is appreciated as the seventeenth century's most practical reformist in education. He calls for the balance of recitation, instruction, and study focusing on individual readiness to receive a holistic form of education. The wholeness he stresses emerges from the education which proposes "all that is proper for man, and is one in which all men who are born into the world should share".[4] True knowledge, while beginning with the senses, passes into memory through individual imagination which can only be experienced in eloquent creativity rather than predictive efficiency.

While Comenius has a compulsion for systematic detail in pedagogy, the individual student is called upon to manipulate his

environment through objects, pictures, and fabrications.[5] Clearly the replication of particulars in a relationship prescribed by authorities as correct bares little resemblence to the fertile conceptions proposed by Comenius.

The aims of education, though as varied as the human participants, contain a common thread of perfectability described by John Dewey. The correctness of educational process must consider the existing conditions focusing upon the resources and difficulties of individual situations. Ends to education dilemnas do not lie outside the activity of our education, but rather make up the concreteness of our situation, they are of themselves educational. Further, Dewey purports education to be formed prior to the attempt to "realize". The realization is seen to be far more than a tentative sketch of phenomena; it is a "flexible" alteration to meet circumstances.[6] Thereby, more basic than skills that may be measured by predictable hierarchies of success, is the method for dealing with conditions that affect desirable alterations of reality. An aim, itself, is experimental; and, yet, to be tested by its very definition, for Dewey.

The creative, whimsical, and poetic are for Dewey the educational result and by-product of play and work in activities often unrelated to the school environment. These notions are seen to be incidental and the educational growth that is secured is accidental. Play is seen to reproduce crudities as well as excellencies in adult life.[7] It is not enough to introduce play and games, handwork and academic exercises in isolation; every-

thing depends upon the way they are utilized. The whole person is assured when the play and work become one forming a new disposition and a new self in focus yet to be defined.

The whole in relation to human experience is given a new dynamic by Dewey, who views the whole of human endeavor to be dependent on a sense of completeness founded in situation. Therein, the whole has only the qualitative purpose required in individual perception and activity.[8] Surely to be efficient is to be in keeping with broad utilitarian scientific notions, ever espoused by Dewey as central to human enterprise. Yet, efficiency that would thwart individual freedom of inquiry in so revered an institution as the school presents a portrait of scholarly treason.

A second area of concern for educational excellence focuses on the delicate nature of discrimination and its almost immediate association with prejudice. To be prejudiced, one must deal in the pre-rational, non-experiential and always unverifiable elements of intolerance and hate. However, to discriminate, one must actively engage in the rational, experiential and verifiable attributes of knowledge. To challenge preconceived notions and belief systems based on pre-rational foundations is a substantial necessity for today's educational excellence. This is not merely the tolerance of difference, but the appreciation of the articulately discriminant. Thus, the whole person in discriminant concert provides a most balanced and basically prepared individual and intellect.

Quintilian concludes that "dullness and lack of aptitude for

learning are no more in accordance with man's nature than are bodily abnormalities and deformity".[9] Interestingly, the positive care and anticipated excellence hoped for by parents is seen to be the greatest promise for achievement. As Quintilian views the broad notions of scholarship, he abhores acceptance of pre-rational explanations or suggestions; "let the pupil be asked questions and praised for his answers, let him never rejoice in ignorance of anything".[10] Eloquence is held to be the avoidance of prejudice and refinement of understanding.

A discriminating taste for oratory is emphasized by Quintilian early in the training of Roman youth. "The worst form of politeness is that of mutual and indiscriminate applause . . . unworthy of a decently disciplined school".[11] While the remedy is to have the young students keep their eyes on the teacher to learn to discern what is admirable and what is not, the lesson to be learned is one of discriminatory concern and articulate awareness.

In an attempt to limit the pre-rational acceptance of what is known to be true, Comenius attempts "to seek and find a method of instruction, by which teachers may teach less, but learners may learn more".[12] The nature of education is to provide a well rounded series of exposures through the training of the senses to connect observations of things with words and provide children with experiences in reality.[13] The resulting exposure results in more meaningful learning as opposed to prejudicial acceptance of what is told to be ture.

In critically analyzing the child and the curriculum, Dewey

views genuine learning as a freeing from the external imposition of prejudice. As a child learns, "it is freeing the life-process for its most adequate fulfillment".[14] As the child develops, the problem of selecting experiences that are desirable and that possess capacities for further growth must be done in concert with child and parent.

Dewey calls for an abandoning of the prejudicial notion of a fundamental difference between the schooling curriculum and the child's experience. He calls for a cease of belief in fundamentally fixed and ready-made subject matter curriculum, which is outside the child's experience. Further, the child's experience is not to be viewed as fixed in stone; rather, it should be seen "as something fluent, embryonic and vital. We realize the child and the curriculum are simply two limits which define a single process".[15] The articulate expression is a continuing reconstruction of reality which negates pre-rational forms as outside the realm of consideration. "Blind and capricious impulses hurry us on needlessly, from one thing to another . . . to 'learn from experience' is to make backward and forward connections between what we do to things and what we enjoy or suffer from things in consequence . . . the undergoing becomes instruction".[16] For Dewey, active experiential learning is a discriminatory process of knowing and connecting the knowns.

Lastly, there is a reluctance to have the notion of educational excellence deal with issues associated with class conflict. Institutions concerned with educational opportunity often ignore

the predetermined elements in the same educational hierarchy. The possibility for a creative, holistic, and positive discriminatory educational future is enhanced by careful analysis of the elements of social class and racial bias.

Although Quintilian participated in a class oriented Roman society, the notions of how to deal with needs for educational equity are firmly stated concerning dullness and lack of aptitude; "they occur, but seldom, and the proof of it is this, that most men form high hopes of their sons; but when, as these sons grow older, such hopes fade away, clearly it is not nature that is at fault but human care".[17] The human care referred to by Quintilian encompasses a broader social base than familial bonds. The child in relationship to the school and society must have "unceasing application, teachers of an outstanding merit, and a wide range of studies".[18] Neither nature nor the family alone are seen as instruments solely for consideration in educational excellence, rather varieties of influences are seen to be acting in concert. For reasons of "common sense", Quintilian advocates public instruction over private instruction, concluding that "every day he will hear many things approved, many things corrected; he will profit by another's sloth rebuked, another's industry commended".[19] The issue of social class is not dealt explicitly, although notions of its potentiality are discussed.

Comenius, while addressing the necessity for close connections between experience, vernacular language, and learning, also purports education could be carried out for all classes; "all

should be educated together, that they may stimulate and urge on one another".[20] The consequence of such an educational posture will have to wait centuries for fruition, yet he remains unchanging in his position though it is not the prevailing position of his day.

Dewey, in reflecting on the new range of people needing inclusion in the American educational process, writes, "what the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all its children".[21] The issue of social class conflict and related emergent racial bias for Dewey has resulted from changes in the industrial, scientific, and political world. The distance and distrust between people in the American democracy is seen to be intolerable. Dewey challenges the society to provide a means to deal with social class bias in a constructive framework. "When the school introduces and trains each child of society into membership within such a little community, saturating him with the spirit of service, and providing him with the intruments of effective self-direction, we shall have the deepest and best guaranty of a large society which is worthy, lovely, and harmonious".[22]

An analysis by Joel Spring provides one rationale for the vague nature of educational excellence's relationship to the notion of social-class bias:

> Schools, of course, provided the necessary education for those filling the expanded white-collar positions. Public belief in the relationship between mobility and schooling was reinforced by those who were able to move from the farm or factory into white-

> collar positions. They tended to see their new opportunities not in terms of the structural changes in American society, but in terms of their own effort through education to attain these new positions. Schooling did facilitate the structural changes, but the direct causes were outside the province of the school.[23]

What is truly excellent has yet to emerge. It cannot be trained for or predicted; it may only be experienced in the whimsical reflections of those who qualitatively appreciate their unique knowing. From Quintilian's belief in eloquence, Comenius' striving to legitimate the reality around him, and Dewey's conception of learning <u>in</u> experience not learning <u>from</u> experience, we come to lift ourselves toward a new vision of educational excellence. What are the real rudiments in learning; who are the learners yet to rise from yesterday's assurances to tomorrow's questions; and why do we heed so little of the struggles of past teachers? We must move beyond the apparition of mere predetermined basics to the eloquent goals that maximize the individual quality of those who populate so diverse a contemporary society.

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